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ABSTRACT

Research on the acquisition of sight reading vocabulary by learning disabled (LD) and normal children is reviewed. Studies are explained to have measured the effects of such variables as mode of presentation, amount of practice, and redundancy. Reported is the general conclusion that LD children do not perform as well as normal children on the discrimination learning (sight vocabulary) tasks, but that treatment and practice produces an improvement in reading skills for the LD child. (CL)

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Prototypes for Teaching Word Recognition-Sight Vocabulary Skills to Learning Disabled Children[1]

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Identifying words on sight or instant recognition of words is a valuable skill for the reader. When the pupil learns to identify words at sight, he is using discrimination learning. The reader develops sight vocabulary by looking at the words, noting the length and other distinct characteristics. He learns to call the whole word on the basis of some cues and with more practice, the reader uses fewer and fewer cues. In rapid reading, sight vocabulary skills are so much in use that we are hardly ever aware of looking at individual letters of a word. In fact, often we are hardly aware of individual words as our rapid recognition of word forms blur into phrases or a complete sentence.

The teacher often helps the child learn by preparing lists of special words for him to add to his sight vocabulary. Words that are especially difficult to spell in English or other languages may come in for special attention such as: enough, could, does, photograph. Then special words for a unit on the study of agriculture might be helpful such as: tobacco, harvest, fertilizer and cultivate.

Discrimination learning has been the object of considerable research and theory. Some of those who have contributed to the body of knowledge on discrimination learning are: House and Zeaman (1960), Ross (1966), Stevenson (1963) and Zeaman and House (1963). In addition, Gibson (1970) has described the nature and conditions of discrimination learning.

The Reading Research Project at the University of Georgia has focused on many variables related to the acquisition of sight vocabulary by LD and

normal populations of children. Only a few of these studies will be reported on here. One study by Plas (1974) presented two syllable six letter words by three modes of presentation: visual, auditory, and visual-auditory together. Twelve LD and 12 normal subjects were randomly assigned to each treatment group where they were asked to learn twelve unfamiliar word sequences such as SOGDAP. Normal Ss were superior to LD under all treatments. Main effects for treatment were not significant. Neither group showed progress across trials. A similar study by Plas (1974) using one syllable rather than two syllable words produced similar results. No treatment effects but normal children learned better than LD. Two other studies by Plas (1974) attempted to use lower case and upper case letters as an aid in discrimination learning for LD and normal children. Lower case and upper case unfamiliar words were presented in both visual and auditory-visual modes. Again, the normal children exceeded the LD children in learning but neither mode of presentation had any treatment effect nor did the upper or lower case letters affect the amount of learning.

Campbell (1974) studied the effect of amount of practice on the groups' sight vocabulary learning. Her study compared 4 trials, 8 trials, and 12 trials. Both LD and normal groups showed a linear trend over practice. This suggests that both LD and normal pupils can deal satisfactorily with instructional procedures involving fairly long practice sessions. Again, the normal Ss exceeded LD's at all stages of practice.

Hosford (1974) investigated redundancy as a variable in learning form discriminations. She looked specifically at how redundancy affects pupils' learning to recognize shorthand characters at sight. Treatment I used shorthand symbols, free of common features, such as above, pretty, knee, and Treatment II presented shorthand symbols with common medial

sounds such as howl, brown, shout. Normals exceeded the LD's and each group showed progress over trials. There was a Treatments x Trials effect whereby all students in Treatment I tended to do more poorly and all in Treatment II tended to improve. Hosford (1974) expanded on the study of redundancy by color coding in red the letters that would help them learn the new words. In this study, progress in learning occurred for both LD and normals over trials but neither group was superior to the other in learning by either method. The results of this study suggest that the color coding of either redundant or non-redundant features may be helpful to LD and normal children in learning sight vocabulary.

Finally, Plas (1974) reports two additional studies in which she examined the effects of presentation mode on the recognition of words more difficult to pronounce. In learning words of low pronunciability, the normal child exceeded his LD counterpart. Treatment mode, whether visual, auditory, or a combination had no effect. The Groups X Trials interaction was also significant suggesting that normal subjects improved from Trial 1 through Trial 4. Similar results were found when the LD and normal subjects were assigned to the task of learning easy to pronounce words.

The overall results of studies reported here have consistently indicated that the LD children do not perform as well on selected sight vocabulary tasks (discrimination learning) as do normal pupils. On only one study was there not a significant difference between the learning of LD and normal. However, several studies have indicated that treatment combined with practice results in improvement in reading skills for the LD child. One tentative conclusion may be that the LD child learns more slowly and thus perhaps with more time and practice may be able to reach acceptable levels of progress in reading.

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TABLE 1

LEARNING DISABLED AND NON-LEARNING DISABLED

Investigator	Variable	TL	G	GxTL	Tr	TrxTL	GxTR	GxTrxTL
Campbell (2)	Amount of Practice	-	S	-	S	-	-	-
Hosford (2)	Amount of Redundancy	S	S	NS	NS	S	NS	NS
Plas (3)	Present Mode/ Lower Case	NS	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Plas (3)	Present Mode/ Upper Case	NS	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Plas (3)	Present Mode/ Hi Pron.	NS	S	NS	S	NS	NS	NS
Plas (3)	Present Mode/ Lo Pron.	NS	S	S	NS	NS	NS	S
Plas (3)	Present Mode/ Short Words	NS	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Plas (3)	Present Mode/ Long Words	NS	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Campbell[a] (3)	Response Mode/ Vis vs Trace/MC	S	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Campbell[b] (3)	Response Mode/ Vis bs Trace/Comp	S	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Campbell[c] (3)	Response Mode/ Trace/MC vs Comp	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Campbell[d] (3)	Response Mode/Vis MC vs Comp	S	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Campbell[e] (3)	Response Mode/ Aud/MC vs Comp	S	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Campbell[f] (3)	Response Mode/Vis vs Aud/Comp	S	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Campbell[g] (3)	Response Mode/Vis vs Aud/MC	S	S	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS

a, b, c Symbols were novel
d, e, f, g, Rebus symbols were used